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SUBJECT: SLA/UNITY: CHALLENGING KHARTOUM REQUIRES BOTH  
MILITARY, POLITICAL POWER

REF: KHARTOUM 01889

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SUMMARY  
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¶11. (SBU) The lesson of the DPA is that the Sudanese Government will only compromise when challenged by a movement with both political and military strength, and SLA/Unity is the only group among Darfur's numerous rebel factions that combines these two elements, SLA/Unity operatives told Poloff in a recent meeting. They contended that popular support for Abdulwahid al Nur is superficial and that SLA/Unity cadres, working in \*secret\* to avoid Government retribution, are gaining Fur support for the movement. Before peace talks resume, they said that the UN must provide a neutral forum for civil society to air its views without fear of repercussions and assist SLA/Unity to solidify its internal consolidation and its alliance with the other major rebel movements, including JEM/Collective leadership. End summary.

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SLA/Unity: Only Viable Rival to NCP  
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¶12. (SBU) The Sudan Liberation Army/Unity (SLA/Unity) is the only rebel movement with the political and military strength to gain concessions from the Sudanese Government, two of its supporters told Poloff on December 4 in El Fasher. While SLA/Unity's military influence is well documented, they insisted that its support within the IDP camps is also formidable. They characterized public backing among the Fur for Abdulwahid Nur as superficial, and the Sudanese Government does nothing to minimize his influence because Abdulwahid lacks any credible military capacity, rendering him impotent. However, SLA/Unity's potent combination of political and military clout poses a credible threat to the National Congress Party's (NCP) policies in Darfur, they claimed. Fearing arrest, SLA/Unity cadres must conduct their civilian mobilization activities in secret.

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Anti-Demagogue  
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¶13. (SBU) In contrast to the cult of personality that surrounds Abdulwahid, the SLA/Unity leadership operates by consensus and does not need a single leader, said Ahmed Abdullah Wadi, who hails from the Al Salaam IDP camp on the

outskirts of El Fasher. He denied reports that Suleiman Jamous, Sharif Harir, and Abdullah Yehia are jostling for control of the movement. "This is not personal," he explained. "This is about common aims."

¶4. (SBU) The goal should be a "comprehensive peace," not one that involves only a single ethnic or tribal group, said Mohammed Jaffar Himidi, a resident of the Abu Shook camp outside El Fasher. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) collapsed because the militarily powerful signatory represented only a single minority tribe (the Zaghawa) while the politically astute non-signatory (Abdulwahid) rejected the accord. A lasting settlement will require both elements, according to Himidi. "Abdulwahid's mind was strong, but he had no power on the ground (i.e. military force). Minni was strong on the ground, but his mind was weak."

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Fur Will Join to Achieve Goals  
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¶5. (SBU) While acknowledging that SLA/Unity is at present dominated by the Zaghawa, both representatives contended that underground efforts to garner support among the Fur are succeeding. "The issue is not politicians or parties," said Himidi, referring to the various faction leaders and splinter movements. "The issue is unity." As the conflict endures, Fur desperation increases, making them more open to coordinate across tribal lines, Himidi said. The Fur only support Abdulwahid because of "family relations" but will back the strongest military movement once they recognize it is capable of extracting compromises from the Government on the IDP's priority issues, including compensation, reconstruction/development, and disarmament of the Arab militias. "The solution--unity of the tribes--is before their eyes," said Himidi.

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Next Step in Peace Process: UN Engage IDPs  
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¶6. (SBU) To advance the Darfur peace process and steer it toward a "comprehensive peace," Wadi said that the UN must bring IDP and civil society leaders to a venue where they can speak "freely." He and Himidi predicted that in a neutral venue, the IDPs from both North and South Darfur will express open support for SLA/Unity and the weakness of Abdulwahid's position would be exposed. They underscored that these discussions with civil society--involving workshops sponsored by the "international community"--must come before reconvening peace negotiations. The UN could then assist SLA/Unity in consolidating the success of its own internal consultations and formalizing its alliances with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)/Collective Leadership and other rebel factions. Once these steps are completed, the UN could reconvene pace talks in a "free location."

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Mistrust of AU, African Venue  
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¶7. (SBU) Neither the movements nor the people of Darfur trust the AU, said both cadres, believing that the NCP easily manipulates the organization through pressure on its member states. The Government does not respect the UN or the AU, viewed both bodies as weak, and will easily resist any effort by the UN/AU to push for compromise. Within these constraints, Wadi reiterated his and Himidi's assertion that only a united, politically and militarily strong movement could counterbalance the Government. They also discounted Libya as a viable venue for talks, saying that in addition to needing more time for internal consultations, SLA/Unity boycotted the Sirte negotiations out of fear that Tripoli would allow the Sudanese Government to intimidate the

movements. They suggested the UN/AU reconvene the talks in either Europe or the United States (this idea has been categorically rejected by the AU before).

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Comment  
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¶8. (SBU) While SLA/Unity may be overstating the degree to which Abdulwahid's support is waning in the camps, particularly in South Darfur, their argument that the Government will only compromise when challenged by a movement where both political and military power is sound. The influence of SLA/Unity leader Suleiman Jamous, who claims both Fur and Zaghawa ancestry and appears to be instrumental in the burgeoning SLA/Unity--JEM/CL alliance (reftel), may explain Wadi and Himidi's optimism about outreach efforts to the Fur. If the UN/AU are to navigate the mediation process to a successful outcome, they will need to monitor their undercurrents and respond adeptly. Given the level of secrecy involved in Poloff's discussion with Wadi and Himidi (which included no phone contact with either operative prior to the meeting, an exchange of messages through a third-party interlocutor, and last minute changes in time and location), such agile mediation will require greater UN/AU capacity on the ground, a capacity which has been sorely lacking for years. End comment.

¶9. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.  
FERNANDEZ